



# MASTERPIECES

---

200 YEARS OF INDIAN ART

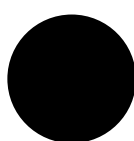
# **MASTERPIECES**

---

**200 YEARS OF INDIAN ART**

28 April – 1 May, 2022

**DAG**



## MASTERPIECES: 200 YEARS OF INDIAN ART

This selection of artworks highlights the unrivalled richness and breadth of the DAG collection of modern Indian art, ranging across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

It opens with an exceptionally fine and detailed early Bengal oil depicting Krishna with *gopis*, and a group of unusually large-format Kalighat paintings. These works date from a period when artists grappled to combine traditional themes with new materials and conventions. The focus on iconography continues in early twentieth century works by M. V. Dhurandhar, Nandalal Bose and M. A. R. Chughtai.

Radically new configurations including the rise of abstraction are found in the mid-century in works by Khagen Roy, K. K. Hebbar, Rameshwar Broota, M. F. Husain, S. H. Raza, Shanti Dave, and a large sculpture by Dhanraj Bhagat. Though highly individual in approach, these artists share a common exploration of the border between the figural and the abstract.

This lays the way for an even greater diversity in the late twentieth century, here represented by paintings by Bikash Bhattacharjee, G. R. Santosh, Rabin Mondal, Manu Parekh, and Prabhakar Barwe, and a sculpture by Amar Nath Sehgal. The personal inner visions of these artists vary from the tantric to the surreal.

We close with a more recent large work by Madhvi Parekh, which brings us back to a focus on iconography but with a difference: a Christian theme, familiar through Renaissance depictions, comes 'home' in a naïve style derived from Indian folk art.



## ANONYMOUS (KALIGHAT PAT)

*Untitled (Muralidhar Krishna)*

c. late 19th century

Watercolour highlighted with silver pigment on paper pasted on fabric  
50 x 38.5 in. / 127 x 97.8 cm.

Registered work (non-exportable)

Published: Kishore Singh, ed., *Ghare Baire: The World, The Home and Beyond, 18th-20th Century Art in Bengal* (New Delhi: DAG, 2020), p. 57

The term 'Kalighat Pat' is used to describe a school of watercolour painting that developed in nineteenth-century Calcutta. It is so called because many studio-shops established themselves in the market around the Kalighat Kali temple. As they were painted on cheap mass-produced mill paper, most were of standard sizes, quite unlike these three exceptionally large works. Here, each sheet was created by gluing multiple pieces of paper onto a fabric backing that allowed for a large enough surface area. This painting depicts Krishna as the flute playing Muralidhar. The deity is shown standing with his feet crossed in the *tribhanga* pose, wearing a yellow dhoti emblematic of spring, and a red cape as a sign of his fertile youthfulness.



## ANONYMOUS (KALIGHAT PAT)

*Untitled (Shiva as Master Musician)*

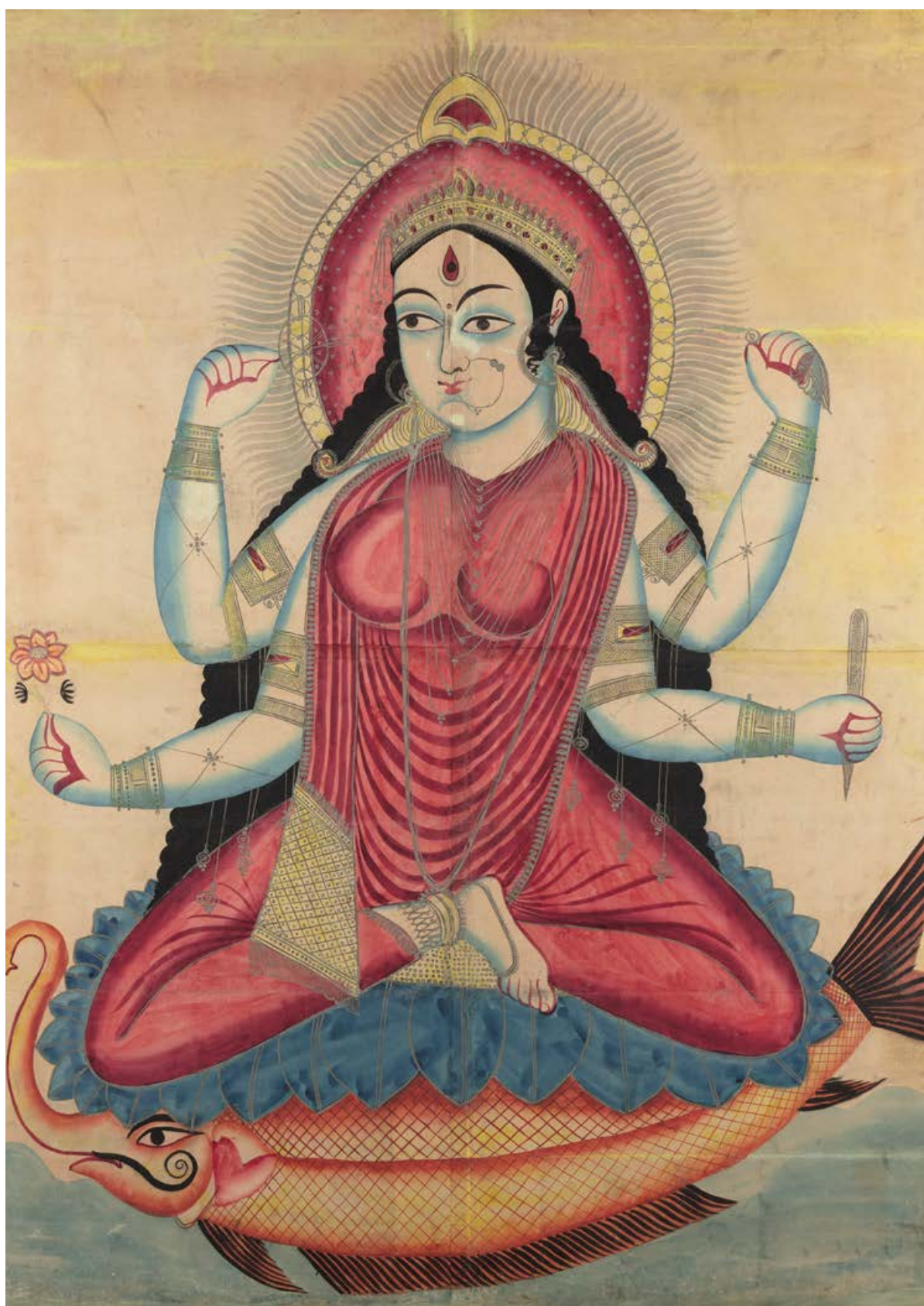
c. late 19th century

Watercolour highlighted with silver pigment on paper pasted on fabric  
50 x 38.5 in. / 127 x 97.8 cm.

Registered work (non-exportable)

Published: Kishore Singh, ed., *Ghare Baire: The World, The Home and Beyond, 18th-20th Century Art in Bengal* (New Delhi: DAG, 2020), p. 58

This pat shows Shiva as a master musician playing the Veena. In Bengal, Shiva's identity was shaped by his relationship to Parvati or Durga, and in popular culture he was seen as a mild-mannered being with a rotund physique. As a deity worshipped by both the elite and the masses, his appearance reflected both aspects. In the painting, he wears an animal-skin skirt, but also has a neatly trimmed and parted moustache and clean-shaven cheeks. Across all three paintings, we see challenges faced by the *patua* artist in readjusting proportions for this large format, resulting here in the upper torso appearing larger in scale than the legs.



## ANONYMOUS (KALIGHAT PAT)

*Untitled (Ganga)*

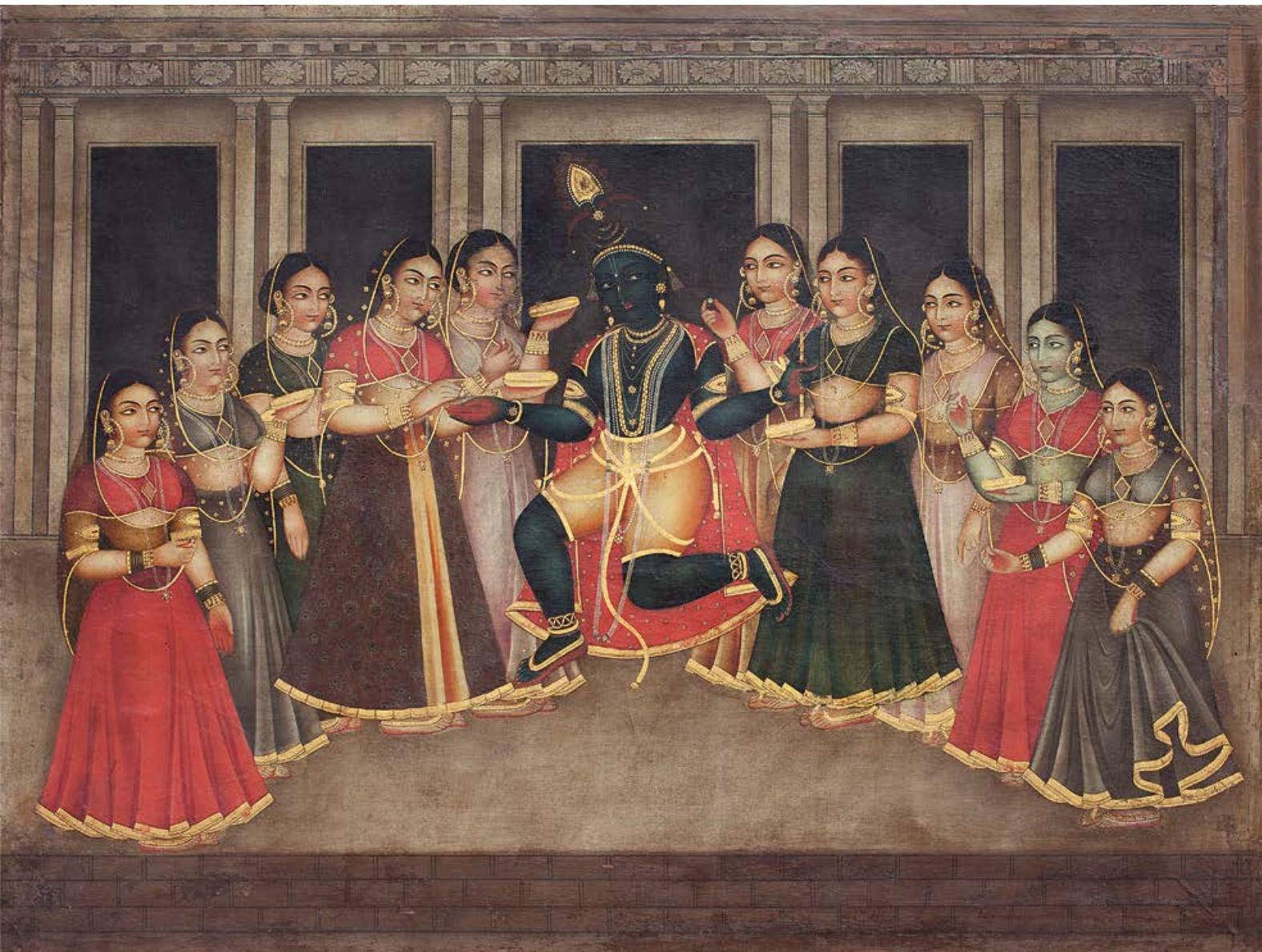
c. late 19th century

Watercolour highlighted with silver pigment on paper pasted on fabric  
50 x 38.5 in. / 127 x 97.8 cm.

Registered work (non-exportable)

Published: Kishore Singh, ed., *Ghare Baire: The World, The Home and Beyond, 18th-20th Century Art in Bengal* (New Delhi: DAG, 2020), p. 59

Each of the three large paintings show traditional Kalighat Pat iconography and design, embellished with a metallic silver pigment called colloidal tin or *rang*. This image is of the river goddess Ganga in her four-armed form, seated on a *vahana* called the *makara*—a freshwater dolphin native to the river. Her white visage emblematises purity. In her hands, the deity holds a lotus or a waterlily, a conch, and a chakra. Because people have always been dependent on the river for irrigation, Ganga is a symbol of fertility. Therefore, she is also dressed in a red saree, but curiously missing the *kalasha* or waterpot, which is an object that she is often seen holding. In many Kalighat Pat illustrations of the goddess, she is accompanied by Bhagiratha and the drowned elephant Airavata.



## ANONYMOUS (EARLY BENGAL SCHOOL)

*Untitled (Krishna with Gopis)*

Mid to late 19th century

Oil highlighted with gold pigment on canvas

30 x 40 in. / 76.2 x 101.6 cm.

Registered work (non-exportable)

Published: Kishore Singh, ed., *Ghare Baire: The World, The Home and Beyond, 18th-20th Century Art in Bengal* (New Delhi: DAG, 2020), p. 73

In nineteenth-century Calcutta, a category of commissioned painting developed, using popular Kalighat Pat iconography, but created with expensive oil pigments on canvas. The artists who painted them are unknown to us, but their diverse backgrounds may be inferred—Indian helpers to European coach and theatre painters, struggling miniature artists, early students from the city's art school, or perhaps artists from the Pat trade who learnt to use oil pigments. This painting, showing an adolescent Krishna surrounded by *gopis*, is a curious amalgamation of traditional iconography and a European-style interior. The country of Braj is here relocated from Mathura to Calcutta, the colonial capital. The edges of the figures, as well as the architecture of the backdrop, are shaded so as to suggest three-dimensionality.



**M. V. DHURANDHAR**  
1867-1944

*Untitled (Vishnu)*

1904

Oil on canvas

33 x 23.2 in. / 83.8 x 58.9 cm.

Signed in English and dated in Hindi

(lower right) 'M Dhurandhar / 04'

Registered work (non-exportable)

M. V. Dhurandhar was a prolific artist who worked across genres using the academic technique—painting for both himself and his clients, as well as making template designs for commercial printing. Between 1901 and 1913, Dhurandhar was invited to work with Sheth Purushottam Vishram Mavji at his Laxmi Art Printing Press where he made mythological illustrations for the periodical *Subarnamala* and other publications. The painting of Vishnu from 1904 demonstrates Dhurandhar's mastery over religious iconography, but placed within a realistic environment. Vishnu, the blue-skinned deity, is seen standing on a lotus leaf in the middle of a river, his four arms stretched in different directions. In his hands, he holds the Sudarshana Chakra, a conch, a golden *gada* or mace, and a lotus flower.





## NANDALAL BOSE

1882-1966

*Untitled (Preparatory Drawing of Sati)*

Graphite on paper

11.7 x 7.7 in. / 29.7 x 19.6 cm.

National Art Treasure

(non-exportable work)

Published: Kishore Singh, ed., *The Art of Santiniketan* (New Delhi: DAG, 2015), p. 163

*Untitled (Sati)*

Kokka woodblock print highlighted with gold pigment on paper

9.5 x 6.5 in. / 24.1 x 16.5 cm.

On print: Signed in Hindi (lower right)

'Nandalal'

Published: Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of a New Indian Art: Artists, Aesthetics and Nationalism in Bengal, c. 1850-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 287; Kishore Singh, ed., *The Art of Bengal* (New Delhi: DAG, 2012), p. 116; Paula Sengupta, *The Printed Picture: Four Centuries of Indian Printmaking, Volume Two* (New Delhi: DAG, 2012), p. 323; Kishore Singh, ed., *Ghare Baire: The World, The Home and Beyond, 18-20th Century Art in Bengal* (New Delhi: DAG, 2020), p. 88

Nandalal Bose exhibited two artworks depicting Shiva and Sati at the 1908 inaugural exhibition of the Indian Society of Oriental Art in Calcutta. Sati was awarded the first prize and was later acquired by the National Gallery of Modern Art. The exhibition occurred before his travels to Ajanta with Lady Christiana Herringham during 1910-11 that profoundly impacted his career. Two artworks related to that acclaimed painting are shown here. One of them is a line drawing using graphite, which appears very close to the final version. In it, the seated woman is defined only through an outline, except her hair, which Bose detailed with utmost care. Alongside this, we see a print of the painting that Bose made later. It bears his signature in Devanagari, to help a larger audience identify him with the image.



**M. A. R. CHUGHTAI**  
1897-1975

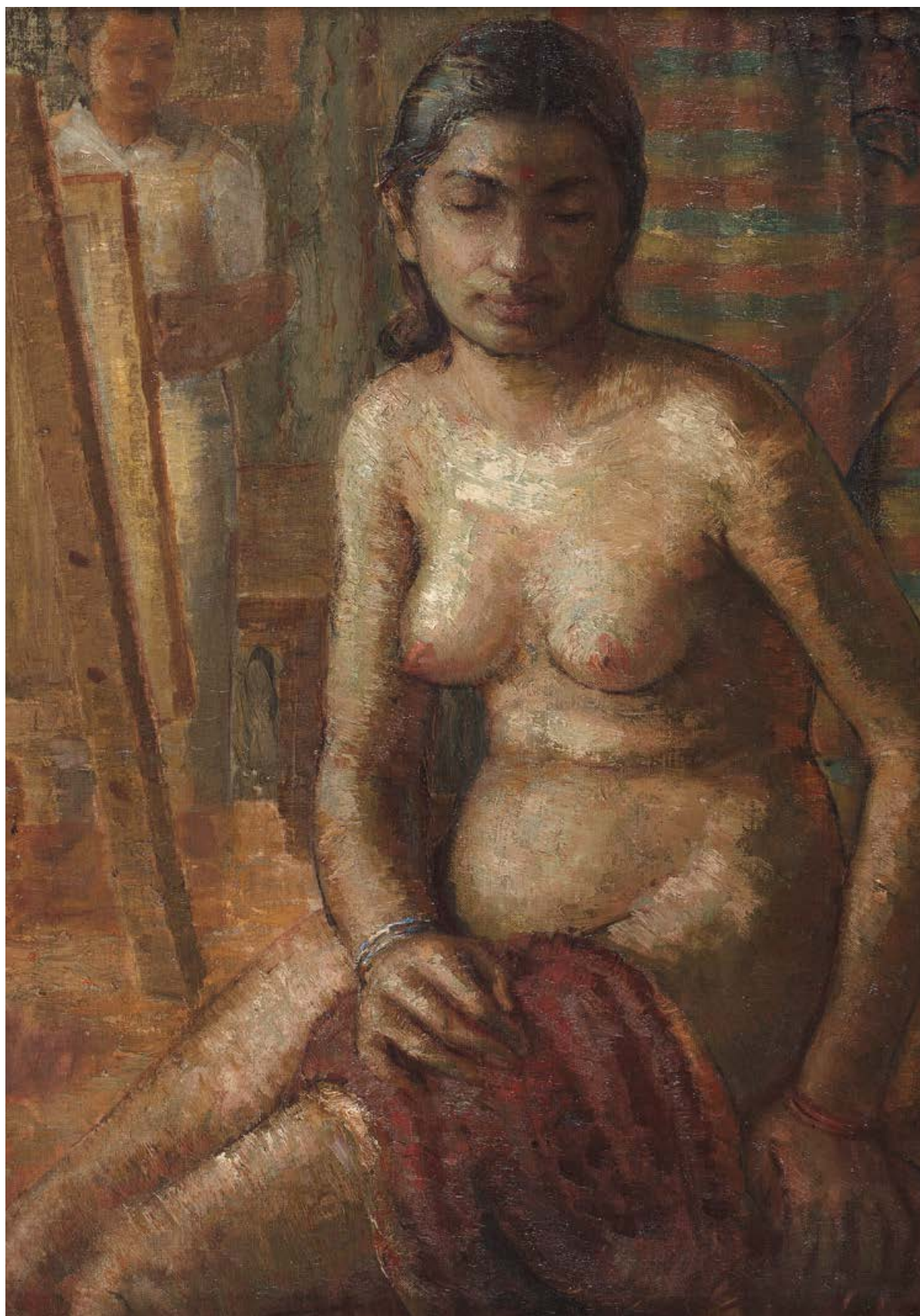
*Worship*

Watercolour wash on handmade paper  
pasted on paper

21 x 14.7 in. / 53.3 x 37.3 cm.

Verso: Label with artist name, title, and  
inscription in English

Considered Pakistan's national artist, Abdur Rahman Chughtai was an exceptionally decorated painter and printmaker, with deep roots in the Bengal School art movement. Born in Lahore, he was enrolled at Mayo School of Art under vice-principal Samarendranath Gupta, who in turn had studied with Abanindranath Tagore. Chughtai exhibited with the Indian Society of Oriental Art during the 1920s, and held solo shows in Europe during 1927-31. *Worship*, emblematic of his style, shows a woman offering prayers at dusk. Dressed in yellow clothing with her head partially covered, the figure stands bent slightly forward with lotuses hanging from her outstretched palms. The firm outlines are typical of the Bengal School aesthetic.



**K. K. HEBBAR**  
1911-1996

*Untitled (Nude)*

1949

Oil on canvas

30 x 23 in. / 76.2 x 58.4 cm.

Signed and dated in English (upper right)

'Hebbar / 1949'

Published: Kishore Singh, ed., *The Naked and the Nude: The Body in Modern Indian Art, Edition Two* (New Delhi: DAG, 2015), p. 79

*Nude* by K. K. Hebbar is an expertly painted studio portrait of a seated model. The technique employed is a fusion of realism and impressionism—as seen in the unblended, almost textured paint. He was perhaps inspired by Charles Gerrard, an English impressionist painter, under whom Hebbar studied and subsequently worked at Mumbai's J. J. School of Art during 1939-46. The painting is from a crucial decade in the artist's life. In 1947, Hebbar was awarded the coveted gold medal at the Bombay Art Society's annual exhibition. In 1948, an album called *Hebbar: Drawings & Paintings* of his work was published with an introduction by contemporary art critic Govindaraj Venkatachalam. In 1949, he received a grant from the Indian government that allowed him to travel to France on an academic tour.



**KHAGEN ROY**  
1907-83

*Untitled* (Diptych)

1940s

Tempera and gold leaf on Masonite board  
60.5 x 95.5 in. / 153.7 x 242.6 cm.

Signed and dated in Bengali (lower left)

'Khagen Roy / Ashwin - 49'

Published: Kishore Singh, ed., *Ghare Baire: The World, The Home and Beyond, 18th-20th Century Art in Bengal* (New Delhi: DAG, 2020), pp. 102-103

Khagen Roy is known for his largescale, almost mural-like paintings. Even though he was academically trained under D. P. Roy Chowdhury at Chennai's government art college, Roy never fully gravitated towards realism. The technique he developed shows certain parallels to Abanindranath Tagore's Bengal School, without completely adhering to its ideals. In this large untitled artwork from the 1940s, a wall of lotus plants rises from a waterbody against a gold encrusted sky. The ancient murals of Ajanta had inspired Roy in other instances and possibly here as well, as lotuses feature prominently throughout the caves. However, the intentional adherence to academic tenets of lighting and perspective departs from the Bengal School aesthetic.



## **RAMESHWAR BROOTA**

**b. 1941**

*Untitled*

1960s

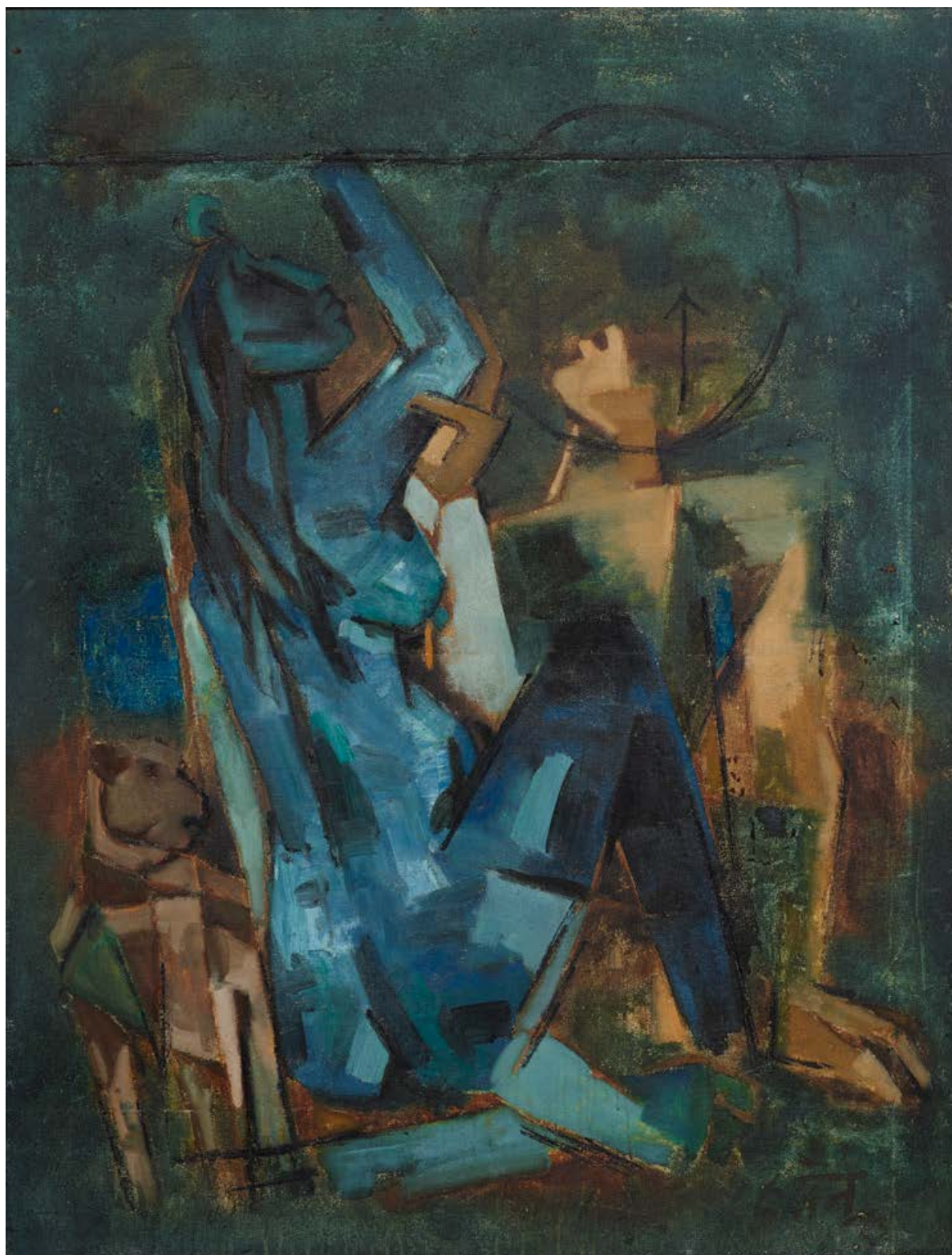
Oil and plaster of Paris on canvas

24 x 24 in. / 61 x 61 cm.

Verso: Artist's signature, name, and inscription in English

Published: Roobina Karode, *Rameshwar Broota: Interrogating the Male Body* (New Delhi: KNMA, 2015), p. 225

In the 1960s, Rameshwar Broota's art moved into distinct avenues: portraits of people known to him, masses of unknown bodies pictured huddling together, and abstracted images that greatly utilised textured relief. Seen here is an artwork belonging to the last category, showing an urban landscape. By using greys and browns, colours that emulate weathering and pollution, Broota shows a congested city with ominously dark monuments near the canvas's top edge. Familiar urban markers in the artwork include arrowed traffic lights near the base of the painting, and shapes suggestive of tombstones in its middle.



## M. F. HUSAIN

1913-2011

*Mithun III*

1963

Oil on canvas

50.2 x 38.2 in. / 127.5 x 97 cm.

Signed in Hindi and dated in English

(lower right) 'Husain / 63'

Verso: Titled, dated, and inscribed in English

Published: Giles Tillotson, *Primitivism and Modern Indian Art: Second Edition* (New Delhi: DAG, 2021), p. 162

M. F. Husain broke into the contemporary art scene in 1950 with an exhibition at the Bombay Art Society inaugurated by Walter Langhammer. Throughout the next two decades, Husain established himself in the public eye by regularly incorporating distinguishing components—such as filmmaking and live exhibitions—into his practice. However, in paintings, we find certain themes to which he would frequently return. *Mithun*, the third in a series of works, is such an example. The subject is based on *mithuna*, a type of traditional sculpture showing lovers, which is generally seen on temple facades. *Mithun III* bears Husain's distinctive angular distortion of the human body, and showcases his innate understanding of colour parity—where complementary warm ochres and cool blues are used to balance each other.



**DHANRAJ BHAGAT**  
1917-88

*Image*  
1963

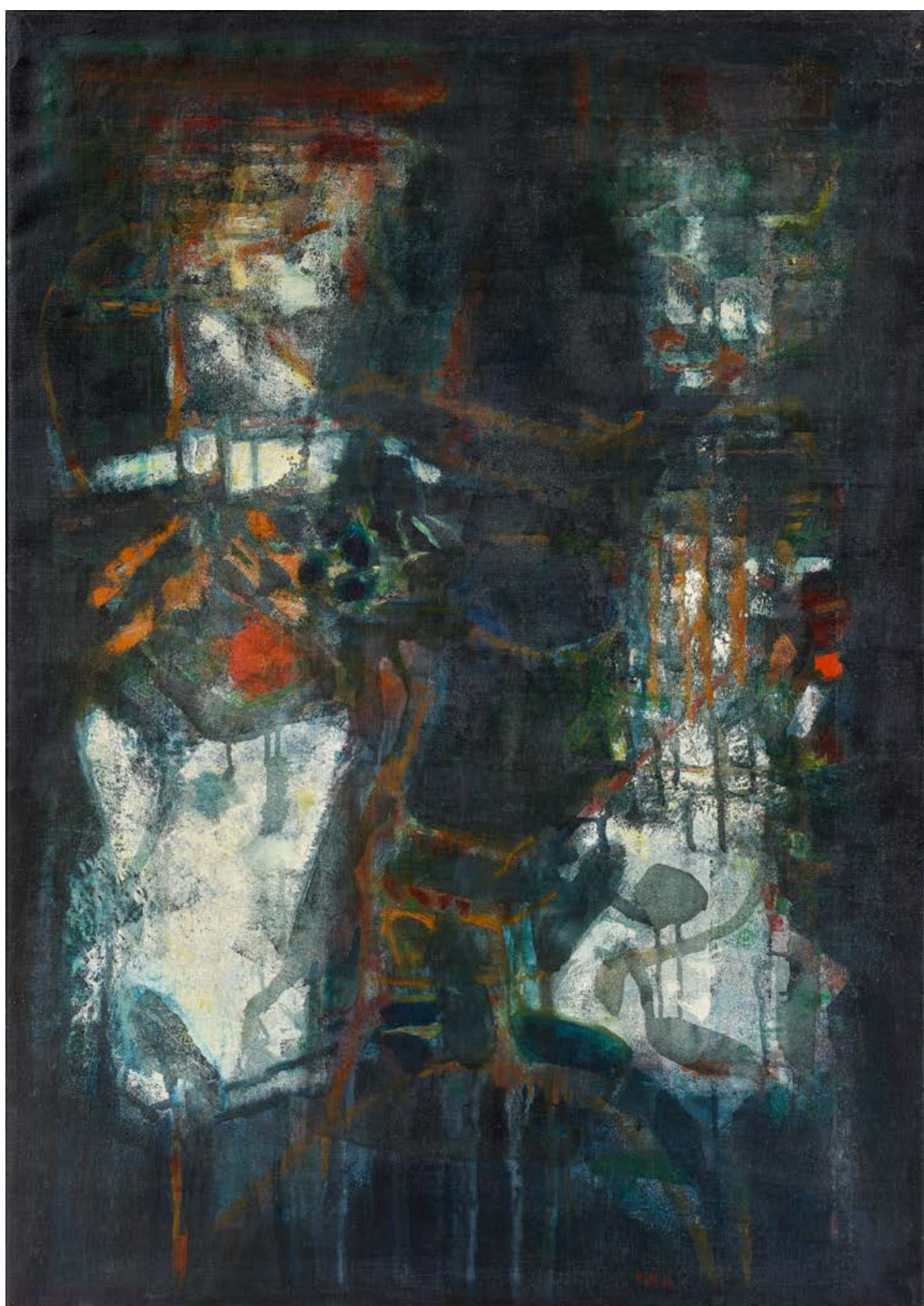
Plaster of paris with steel armature on wooden base

Without base: 63.5 x 9 x 8 in. /  
161.3 x 22.9 x 20.3 cm.

With base: 66 x 12.7 x 13 in. /  
167.6 x 32.3 x 33 cm.

Published: Printed as *Unknown* in *Dhanraj Bhagat: Journey from the Physical to the Spiritual* (New Delhi: NGMA, 2018), p. 28

*Image* by Dhanraj Bhagat is a pillar-like abstract sculpture meant to evoke, and essentially complement the oblong shapes of modern-day urban architecture. A prolific modern abstract sculptor, Bhagat was a founding-member of the esteemed Delhi Silpi Chakra and a teacher—later becoming the head of the sculpture department—at New Delhi’s College of Art. In a monograph published by the Lalit Kala Akademi in 1964, historian and art critic Charles Fabri praised the sculptor: ‘In Dhanraj Bhagat we have among us a descendent of those great masters who had created, age after age, in ancient India, in every period, fresh forms of sculpture, always ready to change and learn.’



**S. H. RAZA**  
1922-2016

*Untitled (Bois des Amants)*

1964

Oil on canvas

36 x 25.5 in. / 91.4 x 64.8 cm.

Signed and dated in English (lower right)

'Raza / 64'

Verso: Signed, inscribed and dated in English

Published: Ashok Vajpeyi, *7 Contemporary Indian Artists* (New Delhi: Bookwise, 2003), p. 160

In the 1960s, S. H. Raza's art actively engaged with French society, especially after he was awarded the coveted Prix de la Critique in 1956. He subsequently held three consecutive exhibitions at Paris's Galerie Charpentier (1960-62). In 1962, when he travelled to the United States to teach art at Berkeley University, Raza was inspired by the work of American abstract expressionists. The influence is clearly visible in paintings he made immediately after, such as the 1964 *Bois des Amants* ('lovers' woods'). Geeti Sen, who chronicled the artist, wrote about this period: 'What is created in Raza's fragmentation of forms are analogies—not the outward manifestation of reality as in his earliest works, or the imaginary landscapes in his early gouaches—but "the real thing", through the substantial realm of colour.'





**SHANTI DAVE**  
b. 1931

*Untitled*

1968

Oil and encaustic on canvas

70 x 50 in. / 177.8 x 127 cm.

Signed and dated in English (upper right)

'Shanti Dave / 68'

The 1960s was an important phase in Shanti Dave's career. He started using encaustic as a medium to create shallow elevations in his paintings, upon which he would inscribe or stamp an illegible script—as seen in this untitled 1968 artwork. During this decade, Dave consistently exhibited abroad: London in 1961 and 1962, Tel Aviv in 1962, Rome, Ohio and Chicago in 1963, Sidney in 1964, as well as Sao Paulo and Tokyo in 1965. He also found success as a muralist with several commissioned projects for Air India (for their spaces in Mumbai, New Delhi, Frankfurt, Rome, New York, Sidney and Perth), the India Pavilion for 1967's Montreal Expo, as well as for the 1969 Gandhi Centenary celebration in New Delhi.



**AMAR NATH SEHGAL**  
1922-2007

*Lovers*

1967

Bronze on bronze base

Without base: 36.5 x 16.7 x 10.2 in. / 92.7 x 42.4 x 25.9 cm.

With base: 41.2 x 16.7 x 12.2 in. / 104.6 x 42.4 x 31 cm.

Signed, dated, and inscribed in English (back)

'Sehgal / 1967 / 5/5'

Edition 5 of 5

Born in present-day Attock in Pakistan, Amar Nath Sehgal moved to India during the Partition. Sehgal was a well-travelled artist, known for his work across sculpture, painting, poetry, graphics, and tapestry. He was also renowned for his public works, which include a bronze statue of Mahatma Gandhi (1960) installed at Ram Bagh gardens in Amritsar. In 1986, Sehgal made *The Captive* for the UN conference on sanctions against South Africa, which was later installed on Robben Island—the location of Nelson Mandela's imprisonment. He made this abstract sculpture called *Lovers* in 1967, a period in his life when he had a slew of international exhibitions.



## MANU PAREKH

b. 1939

*Landscape of Shiva* (Diptych)

1970

Oil, dry pastel, charcoal, and graphite  
on canvas

66.5 x 48 in. / 168.9 x 121.9 cm.

Signed and dated in English (lower right)

'Manu Parekh / 70'

Verso: Signed, dated, titled, and inscribed  
in English, and inscribed on stretcher in  
English

Published: *Manu Parekh: 60 Years of Selected  
Works* (New Delhi: Aleph, 2017), p. 89

Born in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, Manu Parekh formally studied art at Sir J. J. School of Art. He joined the Weavers' Service Centre in Mumbai and was transferred, in 1965, to Kolkata—where he was captivated by the richness of the city's culture. The popularity of the female-centric Shakti tradition of worship inspired Parekh, which is distinctly visible in the art he made during this period. *Landscape of Shiva*, seen here, was part of a major retrospective on the artist. In this painting, the entire surface is made up of a juxtaposition of geometric and organic shapes—some phallic, while others are yonic—utilising an earthy palette.



**BIKASH BHATTACHARJEE**  
1940-2006

*Untitled*

1977

Oil on oil paper pasted on canvas

30.2 x 44 in. / 76.7 x 111.8 cm.

Signed and dated in English (upper left)

'Bikash / 77'

Verso: Artist's name and inscription in English; torn label with inscription and artist's name in English

In the 1970s, Bikash Bhattacharjee had matured his hyper-realistic technique, garnering critical acclaim with series like *Doll* and *She*. Given this untitled painting's date, it is an exceptional stylistic departure. The distorted proportions of the green, almost extraterrestrial creatures—replete with striated linear details and oblong patches—and the rich texturing behind them are comparable to the style Bhattacharjee utilised in the previous decade. The pair of bald human figures in the foreground show the artist's trademark treatment of eyes. The woman is eyeless, while the man has dark, narrow slits. Bhattacharjee uses uneven shadows around the figures and the red fruit in the centre—possibly a reference to the apple of Eden—in creating an uneasy depiction of realism.



## G. R. SANTOSH

1929-97

*Untitled*

1978

Oil on canvas

60 x 50 in. / 152.4 x 127 cm.

Verso: Signed in Hindi and dated in English; artist's name in English on stretcher

Published: Kishore Singh, ed., *Awakening: A Retrospective of G. R. Santosh* (New Delhi: DAG, 2011), p. 145

'*Tantra* was not an intellectual exercise for me, but an internal urge, a call to understand the truth that is the source and underlying principle of everything; the truth that fashions the contours of our creative expression', G. R. Santosh had written explaining his process. In 1964, Santosh undertook an intellectual pilgrimage to the ice *lingam* in the Amarnath caves of south Kashmir, where his life was permanently altered by Kashmiri Shaivism. He developed a ritualistic style of painting, where the *tantric* ideals of *purusha* and *prakriti* feature alongside geometric shapes from mandala designs. In this untitled work from 1978—painted a year after the central government awarded Santosh the Padma Shri—the feminine principle and womb are shown, constructed in symmetry to the central vertical axis.



## RABIN MONDAL

1929-2019

*Awaiting Master's Arrival*

1982

Oil on canvas

50 x 39 in. / 127 x 99.1 cm.

Signed and dated in English (lower left)

'Rabin / 1982'

Verso: Titled and inscribed in English

Published: Santo Datta, *After the Fall: Time, Life & Art of Rabin Mondal* (New Delhi: DAG, 2005), p. 91; Kishore Singh, ed., *Kingdom of Exile: A Rabin Mondal Retrospective* (New Delhi: DAG, 2014), p. 79

Rabin Mondal's *Awaiting Master's Arrival* presents a natural continuation from his *King* series, which showed the corruption and insecurities of powerful men. In this painting, a male figure is shown seated on the floor, his arm protectively placed around the foot of his master's chair. Unlike Mondal's *King* who look emaciated by their hunger for authority, this figure appears healthy. Behind him are placed part of the unknown master's domicile—a great green doorway with matching drapes, and a red metal gate. The imagery highlights social inequality and the lack of mindfulness of those in power, and hints at the question: if the gate were fully closed, would the man have been spared the humiliation of his present task?



**PRABHAKAR BARWE**  
1936-95

*Eighty-Five Safety Pins*  
1990

Enamel on canvas

58.2 x 46.5 in. / 147.8 x 118.1 cm.

Verso: Signed and dated in Marathi; title, date, inscription, and artist's name in English

Published: Prabhakar Barwe, 'Experimenting with Computer Graphics: In Search of Aesthetic Objectivity', *Leonardo*, Vol. 26, No. 1, 1993, p. 73

Describing this painting, Prabhakar Barwe wrote in the February 1993 issue of the academic journal *Leonardo*, 'In *Eighty-Five Safety Pins*, formal variations of safety pin size and the interrelationships of pin groups were based on chance assembly, similar to a random falling together of the pins.' The artwork was part of a landmark 1991 Mumbai exhibition called *State of the Art*, where conventional artists explored computer-aided design for the very first time in India. Alongside geometric designs—inspired by his experience at the Weavers' Service Centre as an art director in the 1970s—everyday household objects populated much of Barwe's art. Among them, we find oil lamps, clocks, bottles, and, as seen here, the inconspicuous safety-pin enlarged to enormous proportions.



**MADHVI PAREKH**  
b. 1942

*Last Supper* (Triptych)

2020

Acrylic on canvas

72 x 240 in. / 182.9 x 609.6 cm.

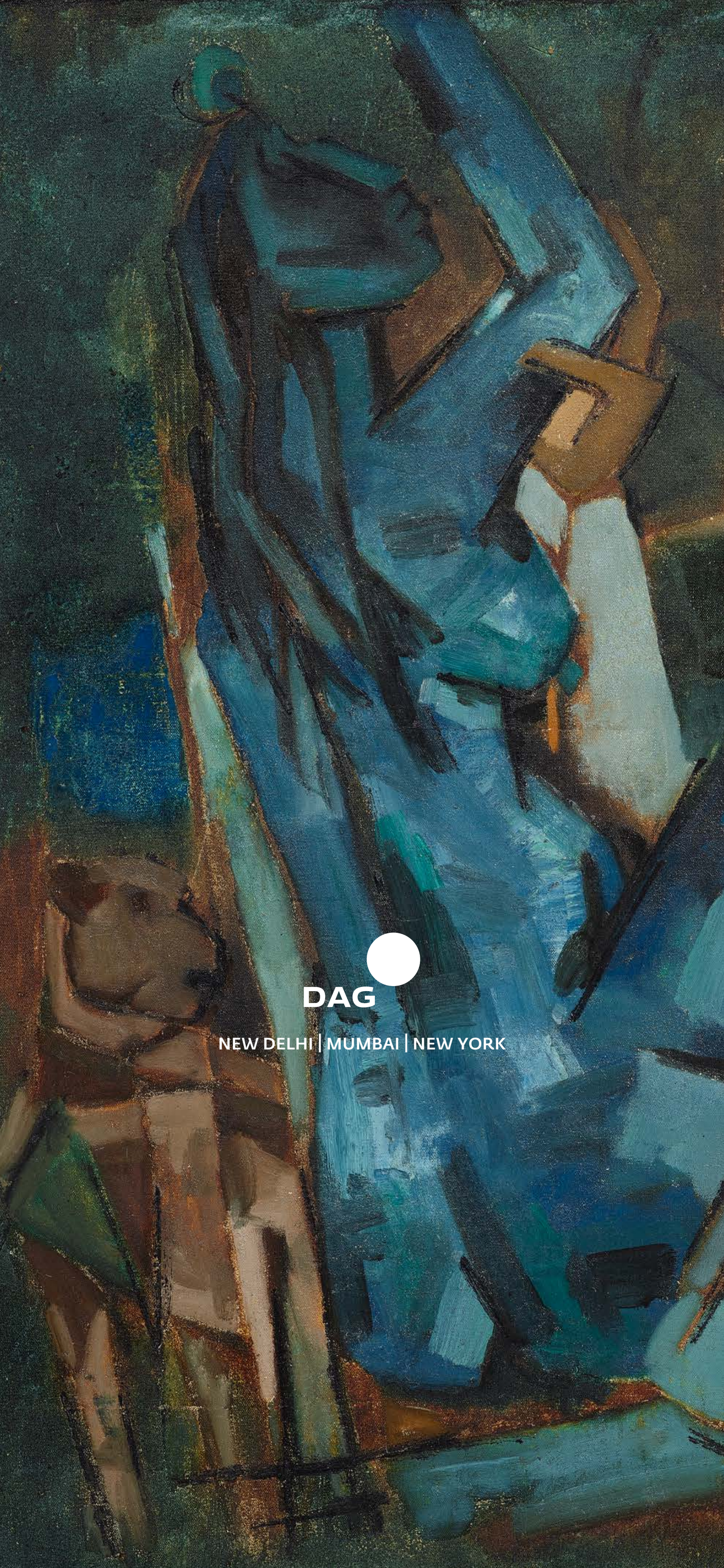
Signed in Hindi and dated in English

(lower right) 'Madhvi / 1-6-20'

Verso: Three numbered panels, each signed in Hindi and dated in English, with artist's name, title, and inscription in English

The Last Supper is a subject that recurs in Madhvi Parekh's art, often on a grand scale. This triptych made in 2020 is comparable in size to a reverse glass painting on the same subject from 2011. Unlike the earlier artwork that included visual aspects from Leonardo da Vinci's famous mural, here Parekh showcases her characteristic technique and style that she has perfected over decades. In the painting, Christ—identifiable by the winged angels behind him—is surrounded by the twelve apostles. To his right, sit John the Apostle and Judas Iscariot. John, youngest among the men, is beardless, while Judas is clearly marked as the betrayer.





**DAG**

NEW DELHI | MUMBAI | NEW YORK